

Kill la Kill: Earn your Grades

By: damned wolf warrior

College AU: After her father's death in a fire which tore down her house, Ryuko found herself fighting alone against the world, struggling to keep going. Relying on her friends around her, she lives her life day by day. But fate is whimsical, and her hidden demons threaten to resurface once again.

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Kill la Kill: Earn your Grades

[Introduction](#)

[Kind friend](#)

[Gym trainings](#)

[Wounds take time to heal](#)

[So let me patch them up](#)

[Chemistry afternoon](#)

[Symphony.](#)

[Serenity.](#)

Kind friend

A.N. = First attempt for a college AU. Please let me know what do you think with a small review. It something that take you almost 30 seconds but that gives me enough motivation to keep going.

Thanks for your support!

"Oh, fuck!" Ryuko cursed. "Just shut up!" She then reached out with a hand from her bed and searched for that damned machine called clock, which was emitting a very annoying sound. Once she found it, she tried to disable the alarm, but after a couple of seconds in which she couldn't do anything, she just slammed a fist into the clock, silencing it. Quite satisfied by this, Ryuko smiled and brought back her arm, trying to find a comfortable position. Her rest was going to be disturbed again, however, when her friend dashed inside her room, already wearing a short brown skirt, a white shirt, a small red tie and a dark blue jacket.

"Wake up, Ryuko! You are going to be late again!" She said. "And I won't cover you up this time!"

"Come on, Mako!" Ryuko groaned. "Five minutes more..." She whispered already half sleeping. The evening before, Mako proposed her to study together for the next exam. They went to Ryuko's place inside the campus and kept studying until two in the morning. Actually, Mako tried to study, while Ryuko kept falling asleep, just to be awoken by her friend every single time.

Mako groaned too. "It's already eight o' clock! You have thirty minutes to get ready!" Leaving the room, she glanced back another time. "Your friend is already outside here. Don't let him wait any longer." And with that, she closed the door behind her.

Ryuko sighed. Coming to a sit on her bed, she wondered how could that girl be so awake after more or less six hours of sleep. Tiredly standing up, she went to the bathroom and took a shower. The cold water immediately washed away any remains of sleepiness in her body. Drying up with a towel, she looked at herself in the mirror. In these last two years, her body flourished a lot. She had a slender figure, improved by the trainings she did when she applied both to the football team and the gym. She also had a well endowed chest, not too big but not too small either. Her ravine black hair were messy and shoulder length, but the most strange particulars were the red hair streak that she had since her birth and a long scar. It wasn't very wide, but it began between her left shoulder and her neck, crossed her collarbone, passed between her breasts and reached the right side of her belly. She caressed it slowly, grazing it lightly with her nails. She got it when she tried to save her dad in that terrible day, one year before: She was returning home after a long day with her friend. When she reached the door, a huge explosion set the entire house in flames, knocking her backwards. Quickly recovering, she went inside, searching for her dad. When she found him, it was too late. Trying to get away, tears flowing from her eyes, a big part of the ceiling crushed, felling on her. She lost consciousness immediately and when she woke up, she was in the hospital, with Mako at her side.

Shaking away these sad memories before they got on her, she finished drying herself and got dressed. She didn't need a lot of different clothes, since her "style" was always the same. Truth to be told, she didn't have enough money to buy them, so she kept wearing what she had. Wearing a pair of jeans ripped on her knees, a white loosened shirt with the sleeves ripped just beneath the shoulders, a jeans jacket with the sleeves ripped away and a pair of white sneakers, she went to the kitchen to eat something. The fridge was almost empty and she cursed for this. She couldn't afford now to go out for groceries. That meant that she had to ask him again. She sighed heavily. She hated to rely on him for money. She already owed him a lot. When he discovered that her father passed away, and that she couldn't afford everything she needed, he always

delivered a part of what he got from his job to her. He also managed to get her assigned a room inside the campus, which meant that she would have to spend less for the college. Asking him for money again wasn't something she was proud of.

"I will play the 'lie' card..." She thought. Taking a lemon and giving it a bite, she took her backpack and left the small apartment. As Mako said, her friend was already outside here, waiting for her.

"Sorry Senketsu..." She mumbled. Senketsu smiled her. He was wearing a pair of grey trousers and a white t-shirt, which let his arms and well defined muscles exposed to everyone to see. He was tall and tanned. His hair were short and black. He was a very good looking guy. Girls would have surely fallen at his feet if it wasn't for his eyes: Strangely, they were red. He didn't know why, so he couldn't explain that trait. For this, everyone found him 'strange', so he wasn't very popular. Ryuko, on the other hand, didn't find this a reason to avoid him. Moreover, they were in the same football team. It was just a matter of time before they bounded as friends.

"Ah, don't worry." He said. "I'm used to it. Shall we go now?" Tilting his head to his side, he turned a little, taking some steps towards the hallway.

Ryuko nodded, smiling a little. She reached his side and placed her right hand inside a pocket, while with the left one she was holding her lemon.

"So..." Senketsu started. "Is that your breakfast?" He asked.

"Straight to the point, eh?" Ryuko stated. "It's just a small dessert. You know I like lemons." She lied. When Senketsu hummed a little, she hoped that he would bait it. Without looking at him, and trying to be as nonchalantly as possible, she gave another bite at her lemon. She could almost feel Senketsu's eyes piercing her to read her soul and mind.

"This means you already eat, right?" Senketsu stated with a small smile. "What did you eat?"

"Some milk and cereals." She answered trying not to stumble in her words.

"You are the worst liar I have ever seen." Senketsu chuckled placing his hand in his pockets and searching for something.

"What makes you think I'm lying?" Ryuko asked frowning. How could he understand she was lying so quickly?

"If you really ate something, you would have answered that it wasn't my business and that I should focus on my own breakfast, probably cursing as well. You tend to speak less when you are lying." He explained.

"Oh... Right..." She was surprised by this. He really knew a lot about her. They met during the first year of college, so this was the second year of their strange friendship, but it seemed like he knew her for longer than that.

"Here. Go get something at the bar." Senketsu said giving her twenty dollars.

"No... Senketsu I can't..." She started, but when she saw the he was serious she stopped. She knew that when he had his mind set, nothing could stop him. Not even her, who was similar to him in that way. "Alright..." She mumbled in defeat.

"Good girl." He smiled patting her head. "You shouldn't refrain from asking help. I told you that my parents send me some money weekly. Moreover, I have a job. I can lend you some without problems."

"It just doesn't feel right..." Ryuko said, stopping in front of her class. "I mean... You are doing a lot for me..." However, Senketsu stopped her again, raising a hand.

"Don't worry." He said. "You will repay me leading the team to victory in the next tournament." He smiled at her. "I must go now, otherwise I will be late too. See you at the trainings!" He said waving a hand, already leaving the girl to her class.

Ryuko mindlessly waved back. He was a really good person. Smiling to his kindness, she went inside her classroom, taking her usual seat near her friend Mako in the middle of the room. Taking some papers and a couple of pens, she began writing down some notes about the lesson. As always, however, after more or less ten minutes of listening, her mind wandered on its own and she found herself daydreaming while watching out the window.

Chemistry wasn't her favorite subject after all.

Ryuko ran as fast as she could, dribbling her opponents with incredible easiness. When she saw two more were running towards her, she kicked the ball on the right and ran straight between the two of them. With another strong dash, she reached the other squad area and lifted her right leg. Just when she was about to kick the air, the ball arrived in front of her. Releasing all her power, she threw a powerful hit and scored another goal. Even if this was the second time, she was still underperforming: Usually she didn't need to rely so much on her teammates. In the other matches, she was the one with the most scored number of goals. Of course, she was the first to pass the ball when needed, doing a great teamwork, but she was always over the edge. This time, however, her personal record of four goals per match was going to shatter.

"Good job Senketsu! Perfect aim as always!" She said to her mate as he approached her.

"Honored to hear this from our sniper!" He joked with a smirk. "Come on, let's go back." He said jogging back.

"Yeah... Just give me a second..." She said leaning forward, placing her hands on her knees. Her breath was heavier than usual. She

was starting to regret her sudden idea to not spend the money Senketsu gave her that morning to return them. "I'm a little worn out..." She chuckled.

"Tell me you ate something after chemistry." He groaned.

"Actually... I wanted to..."

"Matoi!" Gamagoori shouted interrupting her. "What are you doing there? Get back in position!" He said approaching them. Gamagoori was the captain and goalkeeper of the team. Even if he wasn't the best player, he was nominated captain since he seemed to radiate an aura of discipline. A guy once said that just by standing near him he felt the urge to follow the college rules.

"Just give me a second..."

"Get back in position!" He repeated interrupting her for the second time. "Otherwise I will make you do laps until you pass out." Crossing his arms, he seemed to grow bigger and bigger as time passed, towering her. The trainer of the team was Aikuru Mikisugi. However, he usually went to take care of his own business, leaving Gamagoori to train his teammates. Keywords begin usually and train. Every single training session was decided by Gamagoori who wanted the best from everyone under any circumstance.

Remembering very well that Gamagoori already fulfilled that threat with some of her other teammates, and once with herself too, she immediately stood up and run back to her position, ignoring the tiredness she felt.

"Captain, I know that our first match is scheduled for the next week... But I also know you are aware of her... Problems..." Senketsu stated once Ryuko was out of earshot.

Gamagoori sighed, rubbing his eyes with his thumb and index finger. "I know very well, Senketsu... You were the one bringing the topic to Satsuki and the student council after all... Did she eat something this

morning?" He asked turning his face a little to look at him. When Senketsu just scratched the back of his neck with an awkward smile on his face, Gamagoori sighed again. "How stubborn, Matoi." He then glanced to the clock. "Alright underachievers! We are done today! Take a shower and go back to your studies!" He shouted loudly. When Senketsu begun to leave, he reached out and grabbed his arm. "Keep an eye on her." He said.

"Sure." Senketsu answered. Then he went to the lockers as Gamagoori said. Drying himself and changing back to his previous clothes, he then went to meet Ryuko.

"What did he said?" She asked leading the way towards the bar. It was midday and she was pretty hungry.

"He asked me to keep an eye on you. He is worried that you aren't eating propely." Senketsu answered earning a couple of blinks from her friend.

"It's none of his business. Hell, what the fuck got on all of you? I'm eating enough!" She said, but a sudden grumble from her stomach quickly countered her words.

Senketsu lifted an eyebrow. "I'm not sure about this." He said bluntly. "How much money do you have?"

"Enough..." Ryuko answered, turning her head unable to keep eye contact and coming to a stop.

"You are lying."

"Shut up..." She replied adjusting her backpack, a feeling of uneasiness dwelling inside her.

"Ryuko..." He warned placing a hand on her shoulder.

"I said shut up!" She snapped, shoving away his hand. After a moment of silence, she sighed. "I'm sorry... I didn't mean to be mad

at you... It's just..." She clenched her fists both in anger and exasperation. "It doesn't seem right... I don't want to rely on others for my problems..."

"Ryuko, I understand your feelings." He said calmly, placing his hand on her shoulder again. "But this is not a joke. We are talking about your health and I'm trying to help you. This is important, you can understand it. I know you have some pride. You told me that yourself. But is it really more important than your welfare?" Ryuko shook her head, lowering her gaze. She was lucky to have a friend like him, who knew her good enough to bare with her behavior, never judging her and never leaving her side.

"Good." He said patting her shoulder, speaking with a kind tone. "Now, will you answer me? How much money do you have?"

"Just the twenty you gave me..." She answered with a low voice.

"What about your fridge?"

"Almost empty..." She turned her face on the side to hide the shame she felt. "I had to pay the college this month..."

"I see." He replied thinking about something. After a couple of mere seconds, he took her wrist and pulled her in another hallway, which led toward the parking lot. "Come with me." He said.

"W... Wait... Where are you taking me?" Ryuko asked, stumbling a little behind him.

"I'm taking you in a place where you can eat for free every time you want." He answered showing a full teeth smile and speeding up. Once they arrived at the parking lot, he let go of Ryuko's hand and took a pair of keys from his pockets.

"What do you mean? Where do you want to bring me?" Ryuko asked getting a little annoyed but curious as well.

"My apartment." Senketsu answered without losing his grin and unlocking the doors of his car.

Gym trainings

I will be honest, i had this ready before christmas holidays, but i wanted to update all the stories together... Sorry... hope you like it and leave a small review!

"So... This is your place..." Ryuko stated, coming inside Senketsu's apartment slowly. It was a normal place like any others, but it was bigger than the one in which Ryuko lived. After all, she just had a small apartment inside the campus, composed by a bathroom, a bedroom and a dining room which worked as a living room too. That was the first time she went to visit him because she never had the opportunity, but now she grew curious about it. There were a few main differences between Senketsu's apartment and hers: The first one was the number of rooms and the second was their size. There were four rooms, which were a little bigger than the ones in Ryuko's place. Another difference was, obviously, the furniture. Not very expensive, but good enough to be very comfortable.

"Come in, don't stand on the door!" Senketsu said with a smile. Taking her backpack, he led her inside, towards the kitchen. "So... What do you want to eat?" He asked placing her backpack on the couch in another room.

"I will just take a sandwich... I don't want to bother you..." Ryuko answered with a low voice, but loud enough to be heard, while sitting down at the table.

"Understood, pasta for the young lady!" Senketsu replied with a goofy smile while beginning to prepare everything he needed.

"What?" Ryuko shouted, placing her hands on the table and standing up, leaning lightly on them. "I said..."

"I know what you said, Matoi." Senketsu stated extremely serious. "And I will not allow you to get away from here with just a sandwich."

Mako told me that yesterday evening you ate very little. Now you are going to eat a good lunch, so sit down and wait."

Ryuko slowly did what he said. Senketsu never used her last name. Not when he addressed her, nor when they first met. Never. If he had used it, it meant that whatever she was going to say, he was going to do what he thought to be right. "Thank you..." She whispered.

"For what? Caring about your health?" Senketsu asked turning to show the same goofy smile of before.

"For everything..." Ryuko stated with a sad look on her face, sitting down another time. Again, Senketsu pierced through her pride, convincing her that it wasn't wrong to ask for help when needed.

"Don't worry." He waved his hand, trying to cheer her up. "Come on Ryuko, you are not this kind of girl. You are the one always ready to pick a fight and strong enough to beat a couple of bigger guys without problems! Moreover, you are our sniper! You never miss a shot when you are inside our enemy's area."

Ryuko smiled. "Yeah... You're right... But I always felt sad when I couldn't handle my problems alone..." A small growl for her stomach stopped her from her current speech. She chuckled a little, amused by this. "Come on, chef! Show me what you can do! If you are not going to let me go without a good lunch, then I won't complain!" She said with her usual energy.

"Aaand you are back!" Senketsu laughed hearing her friend back at full energy. "Get ready, then! Your meal is almost done!"

"Hell, if I knew you were this skilled at cooking I would have come to your place earlier." Ryuko said sinking in the passenger seat of Senketsu's car. After eating what seemed to be the best lunch in her life, Senketsu reminded her that she had to go to the gym since it was wednesday. Ryuko wasn't surprised at all about him knowing when she had to go there since she always asked him to remember

her in first place. After taking a small break in which Ryuko rested a little on the couch, they took the car and went back towards the college, since it was standing right before the gym.

"I told you that it would have been the best meal of your life!" Senketsu chuckled. However, he soon turned serious. "Ryuko, I already told you today, as well as every day from back there..." He said referring to the day in which he discovered that her father died. "You can count on me. Do not refrain from asking me some help."

"Thank you." She replied lightly grazing her neck near the scar. "This really means a lot for me." The way in which he took care of her every single day always made her think about her father and the days she spent with him. Sure, they weren't the closest family since he worked a lot and she always lived in the dorms, but there were a lot of memories she shared with him. Calls, messages, birthdays, holidays...

"Habit." He called out without even facing her.

"Yeah... Right..." She stammered realizing that he was referring to her habit of scratching that spot when she had these kind of thoughts. "I should really get rid of this."

"Why? I think it's something nice. It's something unique. Something yours." Senketsu frowned. "I mean, this habit is something nice. Not the scar. Scars are bad..."

"Oh, shut up! I know what you meant!" Ryuko said before chuckling a little. She didn't know if it was Mako's influence or not, but if Senketsu's train of thoughts wasn't stopped soon, he would have ended up with a strange speech. Not as strange as Mako's ones, but still strange.

They passed the rest of the trip laughing and poking at each other. Eventually, they reached their destination and Senketsu left Ryuko to her trainings. Waving a hand, she went inside the building. Her trainer was going to kill her if she was late once more. Quickly

reaching the lockers and changing in her team uniform, she thought about Senketsu's words.

You can count on me.

He just wanted her to trust him. That didn't mean she wasn't. Of course she trusted him. But it was meaning a different thing: He was asking her to listen to him and to let him take care of her. It was hard for her since she basically grew alone, taking care of herself. However, she was going to give it a try. She owed him at least this.

"Matoi! What are you doing here?" She heard the voice of her trainer scold her. And in the same annoying way Gamagori used too. "Come here, your schedule should have started fifteen minutes ago!" As he said these words, Ryuko rolled her eyes and quickly approached her trainer.

"Come on, Sanageyama! Give me a break!" She said. But Sanageyama wasn't going to do that. Instead, he gave her the schedule and pushed her towards the first gym equipment.

"Break is a word that doesn't exist in my vocabulary! Now move on! I want you fully warmed up! Your sparring partner is already waiting for you!" He said crossing his arms once they reached their destination. Even if he was just twenty years old, he was asked by both the student council president and the other trainers to help inside the gym, which obviously was a part of the college field.

"She will have to wait a little more then! I ate like fifteen minutes ago!" She complained. Looking at her schedule, she noticed that her training program was harder than usual. Suspiciously looking back at Sanageyama, she pointed to the paper, rising an eyebrow. "What the fuck is this? I'm not ready for this kind of exercises! Mind to explain?"

Sanageyama sighed exasperate. Placing his hands in his green hair, he sighed heavily. "I'm tired of hearing this pitiful excuse! You are more than ready! You should have started that program one month

ago! Now, less complains and more work!" He said pointing a finger towards her.

Ryuko held back her curses and did what she was told. At the beginning, it was quite hard for her to adjust at the new exercises. She was still tired for the restless night and her digestion began a couple of minutes before, redirecting a huge amount of her energy towards her stomach. However, Sanageyama was right: The more she warmed up and the easier it became for her to follow her schedule.

"I'm not going to admit it." She thought, drinking some water from the bottle that Sanageyama always prepared her. "Unless he is going to be a little kinder. I hate when he and Gamagoori speak to me like that!"

"Matoi!" Sanageyama called out. This time, however, he wasn't shouting angrily. "Are you done here? Hand me your schedule please." He asked, taking the paper. Quickly checking it, he saw that Ryuko needed to do one last exercise, then she was free to meet her sparring partner. "Alright, follow me, this time I will help you."

Ryuko did as told and Sanageyama led her towards another gym equipment. She knew very well how it worked. Why would Sanageyama help her? Moreover, the number of series wasn't written on her program, nor the weight either. "Sanageyama, I know how this one works. Just tell me both weight and series and I will do them. I don't need a babysitter." She complained.

"I know that!" Sanageyama answered back. "But I need to understand how much weight you can handle before I can leave you alone!" Seeing that Ryuko just blinked deadpanning, he sighed once again. "Just do what I say, got it?" He asked, earning a hesitant nod from her.

That equipment consisted in a small vertical structure than was needed as a guide for the weights. Simply put, she had to place the weights on a bar, position herself under it and push the bar with her

shoulders, trying to sit down and stand up using her legs. It wasn't the first time she did it, but Sanageyama never assisted her.

Positioning herself, she began lifting the weights. "Alright... Let's start" She said. It wasn't heavy at all, and she was sure that she could handle it with just one hand.

"Good. Now, I will keep adding weight to them. I need you to tell me when you have troubles and when you can't lift it at all. And do not even try to lie! This is not a joke! Got it?" He said, shouting at the end to make sure that she was listening.

"Yeah, yeah, whatever..." Ryuko answered, placing the weights back on the supporters. She really wanted to kick his ass, but she knew she couldn't: First, he was her trainer. He could give her an impossible schedule and pretend her to do it every day instead of two times a week. Second, he was a member of the student council and the president happened to be the daughter of the owner of the college, so he was virtually untouchable. Third, even if she was going to ignore the consequences, she was tired, while he was fresh and well rested. He would have grounded her without problems.

Sanageyama placed some new weights and asked her to lift them. They were heavy, but she could handle them. Sanageyama nodded and, when Ryuko placed back the bar, he added some weight more. This time, she was having some trouble and she needed to push more to lift them. Sanageyama eventually added some weight more, just to be sure, and saw that Ryuko was struggling very hard to lift them. Writing down the results, Sanageyama helped Ryuko to place the weights back on the supporters and took off some weight, telling her she was now ready for the exercise. Taking her paper, she saw that he wrote every last missing information. She frowned a little: The weight was a little less than the second step she tried to lift, while the series were less than usual.

"You will need to get used to that weight before you can start with the real exercise." He said before she could even open her mouth. "We

will increase it when you will be ready." And with that, he left to do his own training program.

Ryuko blinked a couple of times once again. She had the feeling that he lied her, but she shook it away. Turning around and resuming her training, she wondered why he lowered the amount of work she had to do for that exercise. She remembered pretty well seeing him shouting to a student who asked for an easier exercise, before making it even harder than before. Why should he actually help her? Sighing heavily, she decided to drop the topic. She couldn't bash her head on something that she didn't know. Moreover, she was very tired. If she was going to finish her trainings earlier, then she would rest more.

Once done, she went towards a nearby door. Her shoulder ached a little, so she needed to rotate them a while. Her muscles were heavy and tired. How was she supposed to fight her sparring partner?

Sighing, she opened the door. The other girl was already standing in the middle of the room, knelt down on both her knees and patiently waiting for her opponent. She was wearing a white tank top, which left her abdomen and her arms exposed, and a pair of white gym trousers. "Too much white..." Ryuko thought. She then dropped her backpack near the door and slowly went in front of her, taking her same position.

"You are late." The girl said with her eyes closed. How could she know about her surroundings without opening her eyes was something that always bothered Ryuko.

"Yeah, yeah, I was eating with a friend and we lost track of the time." Ryuko answered waving a hand. "Just to let you know, I'm quite worn out... Mind finishing this quickly, Kyruin?" She wanted to finish this as soon as possible, so she could go back at home and rest for a while... But obviously, Satsuki had other plans.

"I don't know how your acknowledging of your tiredness will make this finish quick, Matoi... Are you trying to imply a small request for

an easier training?" Satsuki questioned with a cold and commanding tone and without opening her eyes. "If that's so, then I must disappoint you. Last time I taught you all the remaining basis. Now we will start with something more advanced." She said bowing lightly.

"And here I thought you had an heart..." Ryuko muttered rolling her eyes and bowing too. That seriously wasn't a good day.

I wanted to update this yesterday, but Karma (read "Final Fantasy") got in the way ahahah

There is a new chapter for the other stories too, check them please!

Wounds take time to heal

Parents are stressing me... University is stressing me... Still recovering from the nervous breakdown... Something else? Oh right!

DAMNED AUTHOR'S BLOCK!

First, for those of you who are interested, this is the link to my facebook profile

If you can't view or select it, don't worry, i wrote it in my profile too.

Second, i think i will change the three pics of my stories. And i want you to decide them! Draw them down and send them to me on facebook and tell me who you are and for what story you draw the pic! The best three will be used!

And third, if you want you can add a personal question and another one about the story! I will answer all personal question, but only the three winning pics will get an answer to the other question. All answers will be posted on both facebook and the next chapters!

Good luck and have fun!

The sound of an head colliding with the ground echoed in the room, leaving almost immediately place to a well timed curse, which lingered in the air for a couple of moments. The heavy breaths of two girls filled the air, while the long ravine black haired girl slowly distanced herself from her opponent, letting her raise her upper body to a sitting position on the ground

"That makes five..." Satsuki said with a calm tone. Her fight with Ryuko didn't make her break in sweat. She just needed a couple of

long breaths to fully recover. "Seriously, Mato, what's going on? Usually you don't get grounded so easily."

Ryuko, who was rubbing the back of her head to ease the pain, gritted her teeth to hold back her tongue before she could insult the other girl. "I told you, Kyruin... I'm fucking exhausted! Your damned friend in the other room wisely thought to make my schedule harder!" She said in defense.

Satsuki rolled her eyes. If there was someone she hated, that was slackers. She never classified Ryuko as that kind of girl, since she always tried her best in everything she did, but there were some circumstances in which she almost saw her as a lazy girl.

"Just stand up and get ready." Satsuki said moving into her usual fighting stance. "We are not done yet."

Now it was Ryuko's turn to roll her eyes. "Can't we just make a fucking break? I'm seriously going to pass out for tiredness!" She complained, but seeing that Satsuki didn't scowl at all, she let out a heavy, tired sigh. "Just make it quick, eyebrow..." She said standing up again.

Taking position in front of Satsuki, she prepared herself to get kicked in the ass again. In other circumstances, she could put up a fight with her without problems. They were almost on the same level since they began training a year ago and Ryuko won more or less half of their training matches. However, she was tired as hell. She was doing an incredible effort just to rise her arms in a poor attempt to defend herself from Satsuki's attacks.

Satsuki began with a quick left straight at her chest. Holding the back of her right hand with her left hand, Ryuko stopped the punch right before it was going to collide with her sternum. Then, catching Satsuki's wrist with her right hand, she pulled towards herself and slid her left hand on Satsuki's arm to hit her in the face with the back of her hand.

Satsuki saw this coming and leaned backwards. Since she was half-turned towards the right, leaving her left side towards Ryuko, she managed to dodge the hit quite easily. If Ryuko wasn't so slow, due to her tiredness and her sore muscles, Satsuki would have been hit. Instead, after dodging it, Satsuki freed her wrist and took Ryuko's forearm. Pulling it on her shoulder, she bent on the right hoisting Ryuko on her back, pushing her over and slamming her on the ground. In a swift movement, then, she blocked her on the ground with her elbow pressed against Ryuko's throat using enough strength to hold her down without causing any pain.

"And six..." Satsuki whispered. Sighing, she stood up once again and crossed her arms disappointed. "Maybe I should really let you rest for a while. You are seriously doing a pitiful performance." She then moved towards a corner of the room. Reaching for her backpack, which was resting on the ground, she took a small notepad and begun writing something with a pen.

Ryuko didn't move from the ground. She was laying with her arms and legs sprawled. Her chest was rising and falling at the speed of her breath. Moreover, her heart was pounding so fast that her whole upper body was shaking lightly with every beat. Closing her eyes, she wiped the sweat away from her forehead with her right forearm.

"How disgraceful." Satsuki said scowling.

Ryuko re-opened her eyes and, moving her arm back on the ground, she looked upwards and saw an upside down Satsuki with a very disappointed look on her face. Sighing heavily, she covered her eyes with her right arm once again.

"Jesus, don't look at me like this, eyebrow." She said. "I really don't like it."

Satsuki frowned, turning away from her and leaning forward to place her notepad back into the backpack. "As long as you get those disappointing results, I will keep looking at you like this. Improve

yourself and maybe next time I will think about it." She then stood up again and turned to face Ryuko again. However, she froze in place.

Ryuko moved her arm from her eyes to her chest and begun scratching lightly her scar. Satsuki was used to see her doing this little act and thought it was just an habit. There was, however, one time in which, during the fight, she saw the scar poking out from the neck of her t-shirt. When she asked about it, Ryuko answered losing her focus for a little, then she literally shattered Satsuki's defense, grounded her and left saying that she was done with the trainings with a sad and almost broken voice. That wasn't however what really surprised Satsuki. What really struck a nerve was a faint sparkle near Ryuko's left eye and the sentence escaping her lips.

"Satsuki... Please... Just don't do it..." She said.

Satsuki stood there speechless for a moment. For the first time, Ryuko called her by her first name. And she didn't spoke with anger or insolence. Her voice betrayed sadness, exactly like the other time. Understanding that she said something wrong, Satsuki shook her head lightly.

"Alright, I won't... Just promise me you are going to improve for our next training session." Satsuki said crossing her arms again. The younger girl quickly rubbed her eyes a little, then nodded grinning like an idiot.

"Next time you will be the one laying on the ground, eyebrows!" She shouted, strangely happy after their small exchange. Standing up again on shaking legs, Ryuko readied herself as best as she could. "Ready when you are!" She said to the elder girl.

Satsuki blinked a couple of times. "You are not even standing on your feet and you want to fight again? Are you sure about this?" She asked.

"It's more than enough!" Ryuko shouted smiling. Her facial features were proof enough of her seriousness.

Satsuki held back a sharp and sarcastic statement. Instead she just rubbed her eyes a little with her right hand before holding her forehead for a moment. Letting her arms fall at her sides, she slowly approached the girl, who was shaking a little for forcing herself on her feet. Satsuki then rose her left arm in front of Ryuko's face. Waving it back and forth from left to right, she suddenly struck her nose with her middle finger. Taken by surprise, Ryuko brought her hands on her nose, taking a step back. This, however, shifted her weight on her right leg, which collapsed for the lack of strength, so Ryuko fell on one knee.

"What was that for?" Ryuko asked angrily. Her nose wasn't hurting at all, but the lack of seriousness in Satsuki's attack was a blow to her pride.

"Just proving that you are not in condition to keep going." Satsuki explained with her usual cold and stone expression. "Enough for today. You are free to go now." She said waving an hand to dismiss her. Turning away, she slowly reached her bag, crouched near it and gathered her stuff. When she heard the door closing behind her, she sighed heavily. After a couple of minutes, the door opened again.

"And here I thought you could cheer her up. When she leaves the room after the training session, she's always smiling." Sanageyama said sighing and coming inside. "However, she left the gym with a huge frown on her face this time."

"That would be something I would like to see." Satsuki answered smiling. However, she didn't turn to face her friend. She kept placing her things inside her bag and taking them out, not completely convinced by the disposition.

"What happened?" Sanageyama asked scratching the back of his head. Satsuki stopped toying around with her things in her bag. Placing her right hand on her heart, she closed her eyes.

"Some wounds take time to heal." She explained reopening her eyes and looking at the same hand she held so close at her chest. "But

the scars will never disappear... Not completely at least." She paused for a moment. Opening her mouth again, she wanted to add something else, but eventually she didn't. She could understand that girl in a certain way. Her parents weren't the best when it came for family relationship.

Sanageyama nodded, crossing her arms. "Even if it's been an year, she's still very susceptible to the topic." He said interrupting her train of thoughts. Checking the clock, he sighed. "Come on, let's meet the others. We will talk about Matoi with them."

Satsuki nodded back, taking her backpack and hoisting it on her shoulder. Standing up, she went to the lockers and took a shower. Then, she met up with Sanageyama, who did the same, and together they headed towards their cars.

"So... How did it went?" Senketsu asked when Ryuko opened the door of his car coming inside. She sent him a message ten minutes before, more or less, saying that she finished her trainings earlier than usual and he answered back saying that he was on his way to give her a lift.

"It was awful..." Ryuko answered feeling her muscles to feel heavy. The soreness was beginning to fill every fiber of her body and she felt utterly exhausted. "These two wanted to kill me today... Sanageyama increased my weights and eyebrows didn't let me rest, grounding me six times in a row..." She stopped a moment, yawning loudly. "Sum it up to my restless night and you get how I feel..." Placing her elbow near the window, she supported her head with her hand.

"You can close your eyes if you want." Senketsu chuckled. "Get some rest while I'm driving, I will wake you up when we reach your apartment." Another yawn from Ryuko made him chuckle again.

"I'm not that tired..." She answered back weakly, but she felt her seat becoming more and more comfortable and soft. "I just... Need a

break..." However, after a couple of minutes, she was already snoring lightly, drifting into the realm of dreams. When Senketsu heard that, he chuckled for the third time. Stopping at the traffic light, he turned for a moment to see his friend. Ryuko seemed so peaceful asleep. Reaching out with his hand, he moved her red hair streak away from her eyes, placing it behind her ear. When the traffic light turned green, he crossed the road and then turned left. After another couple of minutes of driving, he stopped the car near a building and turned off the engine. Leaving the car, he went to the other side and carefully opened the door. Catching Ryuko before she fell off, he froze in place, hoping that he didn't wake her up.

Looking up to her, Senketsu saw that she was still sleeping. Sighing in relief, he unlocked her seat belt and took her backpack, placing it on his shoulder. Hoisting her friend in his arms, then, he closed the door and locked the car before moving towards the building. Holding her up wasn't an hard task: Ryuko wasn't that heavy and he possessed a fair amount of strength. Reaching for the elevator, he pressed the button for the third floor and waited the doors to open. Looking to the girl another time, he saw that she was peaceful asleep with her head leaned against his chest exactly where the heart was. There was a small smile on her face and Senketsu couldn't help but smile as well at the sight.

When the doors opened, he made his way towards the door with the number two-hundred-seventy-six printed on it. Slowly, he crouched down, so Ryuko was sitting on the floor and at the same time leaning against him. Searching into his pockets for the keys, he quickly but silently opened the door and lifted Ryuko again. Moving inside, he closed the door behind him with his foot and moved towards the bedroom to lay the girl down.

"Mission completed." He thought with a chuckle once he managed to lay her in a comfortable position. "Just a little improvement..." He then slowly removed Ryuko's shoes and, with some difficulties, her jacket, placing them on the chair near the bed.

"Alright, now it's done." He thought sighing a little. Looking to the girl for the last time, he smiled again. The small red hair streak fell in front of her eyes right under his watch. Carefully moving it away, he thought how was it possible that Ryuko had to face all these problems but she was still able to make him smile like an idiot without even trying. He wasn't in love with her. There was another girl in his heart. He came up with a theory once, but he never told her. Maybe the next morning he could share it with her.

"But for now... Goodnight Ryuko." He whispered, standing up and covering her with some blankets. Going back into the living room, he locked the door and layed on the couch checking his clock. "Six post meridian." He thought. "I think I will wait a little more before preparing something for dinner. Maybe I can rest a little too..." A small yawn made his way through his throat. "Just one hour... I need to study too..." He said, closing his eyes.

So let me patch them up

A.N. = I have no excuses... Sorry guys for taking two whole months, but life here has been so hard that I couldn't even write a word... To explain everything I will need a full chapter, so i will sum it up:

- 1) No more university (personal reasons)
- 2) Serious problems with my father
- 3) New girlfriend
- 4) Lost my new girlfriend
- 5) New jobs (just a couple of hours every day)
- 6) Lost my new job

This is all. I have to thank all of you because you still appreciate my stories even if sometimes I just disappear. Special thanks to all of you who favourite/followed me or my stories. It means that someone like my writing style. And special thanks to all of you who left a review. It really helps me improving.

I would also like to thank a few of you. Those who, during these last two months, left a review on my stories:

- 1) Opal, who left a review on "A different story"
- 2) inkvader zim , **again on "A different story"**
- 3) True Guardian Angel, who left a review on "Earn your grades"
- 4) **joe, who left a review on "Second Impact"**
- 5) **sarahdiamond, again on "Second Impact"**

I won't put the names of those who favourite/followed during March and April only because i don't know how to recover them. However, to thank you for your support, I will make a deal with you: leave a review in which you ask anything about me or my stories and i will answer all of you with an author's note in the next chapter.

Again, thanks to all of you, readers. These three stories of mine are possible only because of you.

Ryuko slowly woke up at the "glorious scent of meat", as she always defined it. Rolling on her side, she freed herself from the blankets, pushing herself upwards with her elbows. She had a thin trail of drool on the right side of her mouth and her hair were even wilder than usual. Not even opening her eyes, since she was still half asleep, she swung her legs on the side, while she let her body go on autopilot. Following the fragrance emitted by the meat, she slowly went outside the bedroom. Her footsteps were so light that she seemed to be walking three meters off the ground.

Meanwhile, Senketsu was cooking some steaks in the kitchen. Carefully turning the meat in the pan, pouring a little bit of oil on it, he wondered if Ryuko would wake up smelling the dinner he was preparing. When he heard a series of thuds and dull sounds, as well as an all too familiar curse, he smiled.

"Here she comes..." He thought. Not even turning to face his friend, Senketsu waited a couple of seconds. "Five... Four... Three..." He mentally counted. "Two... One..." He then put aside the fork he was using to move the meat and turned to gas off. "Ryuko..." He warned, lingering on the final letter of her name.

Finally turning to face her, he saw her right hand darting from over her head to her back, while she was smiling awkwardly, trying to come up with an excuse for her failed attempt to take him by surprise.

"Err... I... Was... Stirring up... You know, my bed isn't that comfortable!" She said then, moving her arms behind and pushing

her chest outwards a little. Once she felt her vertebrae pop back into place, she sighed in relief, letting her arms fall at her side.

"Mmmh..." Senketsu hummed. "I see... Too bad this is not your apartment." He chuckled, crossing his arms.

"Yeah, I understood it when I stumbled in the carpet... Man, your table in the living room is pretty hard..." She said rubbing her head a little. "Luckily my head is much more thick! Your table took the major damage... Sorry..." She grinned a little, closing her eyes.

"What?" Senketsu asked shocked, darting in the living room, completely unaware of Ryuko's useless efforts to hold back her laughs. Once he checked the table, he saw that it was unscathed. Closing his eyes and covering his mouth with an hand, he tried not to laugh while thinking how he could keep that little game on. "And for the first time, you tricked me." He thought. "Alright, challenge accepted!"

Moving back towards the kitchen, his face twisted in fake anger, he threw the wooden spoon he has been holding the whole time on the table. "Ryuko... These are serious damages, you know?" He said. "It will costs me a lot." He added, after a small pause, leaning on the table.

At first, Ryuko was about to burst into laughs. She thought that Senketsu was still joking with her. She didn't know she was right. So, when he sighed heavily, her smiled quickly disappeared from her face.

"Wait... Are you serious?" She asked shocked. Placing a hand on his shoulder she shook him lightly. "Come on, tell me you are kidding... Fuck, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to cause you troubles!" She added when he just shook his head, externally calm but internally fighting back a huge grin. He didn't want to end the game right now, but he was struggling very hard to keep himself serious.

"Listen..." Ryuko went on saddened. "I'm really sorry... I will help you repair it... I can pay..." She tried to say. However, Senketsu stopped her, placing a hand on hers. He couldn't hold back anymore, so he decided to act quickly.

Crouching down, he wrapped his arms around her belly. Pushing upwards with his legs, then, he layed her on his right shoulder. Ryuko was caught off guard, since she didn't expected this, and so she couldn't react fast enough. In a couple of seconds, she found herself with her belly on his shoulder and his arms around her legs.

"What the fuck? Come on!" She shouted laughing. "And I thought you were serious! Let me go!" However, even if she was complaining, she couldn't help but laugh at his small prank.

"Mmmh... No, I think I won't!" Senketsu grinned like an idiot before carrying her in the living room, that smile never leaving his face. He could always tell when Ryuko had a bad day or not. And everytime, he always tried his best to cheer her up.

"No! Don't do it!" Ryuko played along, once she saw that he was slowly approaching the couch. "Let me go!" Her efforts, however, were futile. Her laughs were much more louder than her pleads and Senketsu was enjoying every single moment of their little game.

"And here we go!" He said. Pushing with his shoulder, while pulling a little her legs with his arms, he threw Ryuko on the couch with a fluent movement. Of course, he made sure that she wasn't going to be hurt, carefully controlling his strength.

Describing a wide arc in the air, Ryuko landed on the couch with a dull sound. The pillows were soft enough to prevent her from getting any injury, but the sudden shift of blood pressure and the force of the impact dazzled her a little. Still, she kept laughing.

"I won, Ryuko!" Senketsu said crouching near the girl. "I'm the king of pranks! Just admit it!" He said chuckling. Tickling her a little on her neck and poking her sides, he smiled at her reaction. Laying on the

couch, she was scooting back and forth from left to right, trying to escape the sudden assault.

"Alright! Alright! I give up!" She said between her laughs. Senketsu stopped tickling her, sitting on the couch as well. He was on the edge, since Ryuko was laying down, but he didn't care. Slowly, Ryuko calmed down, while the last laughs subdued.

Senketsu gently placed a hand on her hair and begun caressing her. Taking a deep breath and closing her eyes, she relaxed under his touch. He was so caring towards her that sometime she wondered if she really deserved all of this.

"Thank you." She said with a smile, feeling his hand slowly moving from her hair to her cheek. "You really don't know how much it meant for me."

"You are welcome." He answered back, caressing her with his thumb. After a while, he stopped that little movement. He was about to stand up that Ryuko gently placed her hand on his one, snuggling her cheek a little.

"You really like it, don't you?" He chuckled, caressing her again. Ryuko sighed in bliss, enjoying that moment completely.

"Give me a break..." She whispered with a smile. "You know my father wasn't very inclined to show affection..." Ryuko opened her eyes slowly, revealing the sadness hidden inside her. "To be honest, I'm not really sure about that too... I never knew him well..."

Senketsu frowned a little. Never stopping caressing Ryuko, he moved his gaze away a little. "Well... About that..." He begun, stammering a little. "Well... I... Would you like..." Swallowing hard, he wondered why it was so hard to share his theory about his feelings.

Ryuko slowly stood up, frowning a little to her friend sudden embarrassment. "Senketsu... ?" She asked, signaling him to go on.

Taking a deep breath, he locked his eyes with hers. "I mean... I think of myself as your second father... If you are ok with that..." He blurted out.

Ryuko's eyes widened in surprise. "Senketsu..." She whispered with watering eyes. Deciding that actions would speak louder than words, she threw her arms around his neck, embracing him tightly. Small tears were already rolling down her cheeks, while a big smile slowly appeared on her face. "I would love that... Thank you..."

Senketsu chuckled, returning the embrace. He surely knew to make her happy. Even if he wasn't related to her, he always felt a protective instinct towards Ryuko. Sure, she was a stubborn, strong-willed, hot-blooded trouble-maker. Someone always ready to pick a fight. A "on the moment" girl, who act recklessly but manage to come out unscathed from most of her battles. Someone full of pride who doesn't let one's self get pushed around.

But there was more than met the eyes.

She was caring. She was the first one rushing to a friend side to protect him or her. She was sweet. She once tried to sew up a scarf for his birthday. A black scarf with the word "Senketsu" written in red. His name wasn't very well written and she said she did a poor job because she wasn't very capable. He wore it the whole autumn and winter, taking it off only inside his apartment to wash it. And even if people would believe it or not... Even if in the outside she acted so tough and strong, in the inside she was soft... And this was something that just a few people knew... Mako, Senketsu, Satsuki, the so-called "Elite four" and her teammates... Nobody else...

"Senketsu..." She whispered. Her head was locked between his jaw and his collarbone, a small grin forming on her lips for what she was going to say. "Just one thing..."

"Yeah?" He asked.

"Don't expect me to call you dad..."

"Aaand you ruined the magic."

The sound of their joined laughs lingered in the apartment for a while, echoing in the hallways of the building and bringing their joy high in the sky of that moonless night.

Satsuki quietly sipped her tea from her cup. She was with the other member of her student council in the room designated for their meetings. A large room which seemed divided in five different areas, one for each member and one for Satsuki herself. They were wearing their school uniforms, but everyone had a small star on the left side of their chest in which there was written their status as "member", or "president" in Satsuki's case, of the student council. Their meeting was going to be more serious than usual, and everyone was enjoying some tea, trying to lift the stress from their shoulders before facing such important matter.

Their topic: Matoi Ryuko.

"My friends... Any reports?" Satsuki asked, keeping her eyes closed. Slowly leaning behind on the chair, she let out a small sigh, enjoying the small sensation of peace and calm that the hot tea was developing in her stomach.

"Matoi didn't eat this morning..." Gamagoori begun without his usual boasting voice. He had his arm crossed and was standing near a couch. "That's the reason of her underperformance today. Still, she kept doing her best the whole training session. Her stubbornness is impressive, but her resolve is what keeps her going on. I would like her to take better care of herself, however, so I asked Senketsu to keep an eye on her."

"Gamagoori is right..." Sanageyama nodded. He was sitting on the couch with his feet on the table while leaning back with his arms on the backrest. "Today in the gym I saw her struggling a lot, since she was very tired. She said that she had eaten something for lunch. Probably Senketsu managed to reason with her and offered her

something. Still, I would like Gamagoori to be a little less strict with her... I don't want to hear her complain that she's tired again..."

"These guys are slackers..." Gamagoori announced, staring angrily at him. "Sure, Senketsu and Matoi are very capable players and they keep doing their best, but that's not a reason to reduce their amount of work!"

"Calm down..." Satsuki whispered. When the silence returned in the room and the duo composed back themselves, Satsuki let out a small sigh. "Both of you are right. With a reduction of the amount of work, the slackers will surely be a weight. But I must admit I saw firsthand how tired she was and how sore her muscles were. Gamagoori, try to be a little less strict for now. But if you see anyone poor performing you are free to act as you please."

"It will be done." He said quietly, placing his right hand on his heart and bowing lightly.

"Good. What about her grades, Inumuta?" Satsuki asked turning her face a little to face him.

"She is doing rather well..." He said adjusting his glasses and opening his laptop. He was sitting on a small chair and when his computer boot up from stand-by, he began typing furiously on the keyboard. "Her grades are not the best... Her grades goes from a minimum of sixty-five on one hundred to a maximum of seventy-seven on one hundred... However in her last exam she seemed to be less prepared, losing five points for a total of sixty-eight on one hundred."

"Subject?" Satsuki asked.

"Chemistry."

Satsuki stopped for a moment, carefully thinking about this.
"Inumuta, I would like you to help her in her studies. Can you do this?"

"Actually I already asked her for this. Tomorrow I will meet her at lunch." Inumuta answered politely, closing his laptop.

"Good, reliable as always..." Satsuki smiled a little. "Jakuzure?" A silent request for a report was sent to the pink haired girl, who understood it immediately.

"That girl is strange..." Jakuzure said moving around her baton from the second couch in the room. "I heard her playing the guitar a couple of times. Even if it was just a bet she made with the other strange guy, she has potential. But what really impressed me was the feeling I got from her songs. There was... Sadness." She added lowly. "A great sadness..." A small shiver run down her back, remembering very well Ryuko's smile while she was playing the guitar.

She wasn't happy.

"Satsuki... Why are you so interested in this girl?" Jakuzure asked shaking off these thoughts.

For a small second, Satsuki broke her usual stoic appearance with a sad smile. "Thanks for your help. You are dismissed." Closing her eyes, she ignored her friends complain about her decision. A minute later, the four members of the elite four left the room. Satsuki stood up and slowly approached a small window nearby. Looking outside, she watched the sky and stars.

Satsuki... Please... Just don't do it...

These words kept repeating themselves in her mind, followed by the image of Ryuko wiping away a small tear.

Crossing her arms, Satsuki closed her eyes. Letting out a small sigh, she lowered her head.

"I don't know what happened..." She answered Jakuzure's question, but it seemed more an answer for herself. "I don't know how it

happened... But I know she lost her father... And I know very well that feeling..."

Chemistry afternoon

Author's note:

This was a thing? For real? And people are still "favourite/follow" up to this day? I didn't even remember this existed. Guess 4 years is a long enough time already. Pretty nostalgic isn't it? And what are these Ans i put before? Ah, sure, i remember. That was when my life was such a shitshow i seriously thought i was a character in some third rate comedy sketch. Well, to sum up these 4 years, everything went downhill pretty fast (lost a few familiy members, my GF lost her father, i couldn't find a decent job), but you know what they say, when you reach the bottom you can only climb upwards. Not everything is fine now, but i'm doing better. Way better. Not sure i can update this frequently, but at the very least i think i can work on it for a bit every now and then. But enough chit chat, you waited for this long enough already.

"Morning already, uh?" Ryuko thought slowly waking up. Lifting her upper body to slowly come to a sit, she streched herself, yawning loudly. A serie of pop and cracks could be heard coming from her spine. She sighed, pleased by the feeling of her vertebraes relaxing and fixing back into their place. Her mind still foggy from her sleep, she slowly got out of the bed, stretching a bit more to make sure at least her body could wake up properly.

Feeling thirsty, she slowly made her way to the kitchen. Since today was a sunday morning, she was in no hurry whatsoever. Sure, she had to meet that Inumuta guy at lunch, but she had plenty of time. Why rushing things on such a beautiful day? She slept extremely well after everything she went through the day before. Might as well take it easy, right?

Still half asleep, she went into the kitchen and opened the fridge. Grabbing a bottle of juice, she yawned once again. She was about to

take a sip from the bottle when a weird noise suddenly picked her curiosity. Lazily turning her head, she saw a pretty shocked Senketsu staring at her. He was wearing some casual and comfortable clothes and he had a pan in his hand. Right next to him, there was an omelette splattered on the counter. He probably tried to flip it but failed.

"Morning Senketsu..." She greeted, yawning once again, before focusing again on the bottle. She once again tried to take a sip from it, but as soon as the bottle touched her lips she froze in place. Slowly turning her head, she first confirmed that Senketsu was indeed standing there, still looking at her shocked. Then, she lowered her gaze on herself:

She was only wearing her slippers. Her breasts were fully exposed for him to see.

Not even a second later, she bolted out of the kitchen, running back in the room she slept in and slamming the door behind her. Her cheeks reddened from the embarrassment. Leaning against the door, as if she wanted to make sure it remained close, she slowly slid into a sit. By now, her mind was completely awoken and her emotions were in full turmoil.

"Shitshitshitshit" She cursed in her mind. "Why is he here?! Why is he in my apart-" She questioned frantically. However, she immediately recalled the events of the previous night. She ate dinner at his place. They spent the evening together chatting and poking fun at each other after he told her about her fatherly feelings. And eventually, she accepted his offer to spend the night at his apartment.

"Fuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuck!" She internally screamed, hiding her face in her palms.

"Alright! Alright, alright, alright... Alright! This is fine! He already saw you in your underwear before! This is not any different!" She tried to reason with herself. "What the hell are you even saying?! This is

COMPLETELY different! Alright my ass!" Ryuko slouched forward a bit. Her heart was beating so hard in her chest it was almost painful. Opening her eyes to peak through her fingers, he scanned the room for her clothes. As soon as she saw them, she leaped towards them and dressed up faster than she ever did before. The feel of fabric on her skin calmed her down a bit.

Sitting on the bed, she hid her face in her palms again. Her mind was racing at full speed, praying it was just a dream from which she would wake up soon. But as time passed by, she realised that was not the case.

Slowly, she took a few deep breaths. She tried to reign her emotions back under control each time she exhaled. Eventually, her heart stopped beating so hard and her mind cleared up. "No use crying over spilled milk." She thought. "At least it was him who saw me and not some random guy..." She stood up. Reaching for the door, however, she noticed she was still trembling a bit. Shaking her head a bit, she opened the door and headed back into the kitchen. Senketsu was still there, almost done cleaning the omelette from the counter. The moment she saw him, she felt like bolting away again. She opened her mouth, trying to say something, when...

"Oh... You got clothes on now..." Senketsu commented with a wink. A simple joke, poking fun at her. However, she understood the meaning of such a joke. He was worried her embarrassment wouldn't let her feel comfortable anymore. So he decided to try and make fun of it with her.

Ryuko smiled. Even after such a blunder, he was still trying to make her feel at peace. His thoughtfulness was something she really appreciated. So, she decided to pick up the ball and answer in kind.

"Well, it's pretty chilly in here. Wouldn't want to catch cold now, would we?" She said, sitting at the table. Senketsu chuckled a little. Turning around, he took some plates and reached out for her.

"Such a pity..." He said. When Ryuko took the plate from him, he went towards the fridge and took some milk and juice. "And here i thought it was warm enough."

"What, you seem disappointed." Ryuko answered picking up her glass. When Senketsu came back, he poured her some juice and joined her at the table. "Did you enjoy the view?" She teased with a smirk. "Did you wish to gaze at me a bit longer?"

"Actually yes." He answered honestly, earning a blush from Ryuko. "It was quite the spectacle. So much so, i might have actually been charmed."

"Mmmh" Ryuko hummed. "So are you under my spell now?" She asked resting her elbow on the table and leaning her head on her hand. "You are under my control now, aren't you?" She whispered jokingly.

"It is as mylady says." Senketsu decided to play the game for a while. "You wish is my command." He bowed his head lightly, trying to hold back his laughs.

"What an hardworking subordinate i have." She purred. "I wonder... " Ryuko asked blinking slowly. "Is any wish fair game?"

Senketsu felt a shiver down his spine. "Do try to keep it in moderation, Ryuko." He plead.

That caused the girl to burst out laughing. She was not expecting such an answer from him, so her stoic facade broke down. "Really now!" She tried to say inbetween her laughs. "What did you think i was going to ask? Don't worry Senketsu. I wasn't going to ask for anything impossible." She said, while picking up the fork to dig into the breakfast in front of her.

"Glad to hear that." He commented with a smile doing the same.

The duo then fell silent, eating away at their food. Now, the thing about silence is that there are many different kinds of it. But they can generally be split between comfortable silences and uncomfortable silences. And the silence that slowly permeated the room was the most definitely comfortable for both. There was no more need for jokes nor words. They were at ease, in their own little worlds. Ryuko really appreciated that. All of her worries were washed away so easily. She couldn't understand why, but Senketsu was always able to make her smile. He was always there for her and, like Mako, he was one of the few rays of light in her life. She knew he had her back. And that gave her the strenght to keep going.

Once done with breakfast, Senketsu stood up and began clearing the table. Ryuko didn't move however. She remained on her chair, looking at him, trying to recall how many times he helped her out. So many times he gave her advices on her problems. So many times he lent her his shoulder. So many times he made her smile. So many times he made her feel safe.

Too many to count.

"Senketsu..." She whispered with a smile. He tilted his head a bit, acknowledging her call and silently telling her he was listening.

"Thank you... For everything..." She mumbled.

"You're welcome." Was his answer. "Just one thing..." He said, turning around after a few more seconds of silence, showing a big grin on his face. "You should lose a couple of centimeters on your waist!"

"SENKETSU!" Ryuko screamed turning a deep shade of red.

After breakfast and some more joking around, Senketsu offered to give her a lift back to college, which she accepted smiling. Once there, she quickly made her way to her room to get ready. She took a quick shower to freshen up and packed up her books in a bag. Then, she headed towards the cafeteria.

The place was pretty wide since it had to house a large number of students. Nonetheless, it was simple, lacking any kind of extravagant furniture. Afterall, it was just a cafeteria. There was no need for fancy stuff. It did, however, have an outside seating area for those who favoured eating under the sunlight or those who enjoyed a calm breeze during their meals. A few trees also casted their shade on the patches of grass and some students could be seen chilling there, chatting away in groups or studying together.

Ryuko scanned the area with her eyes, looking for someone. Eventually, she found him sitting at one of the tables inside, working on his computer. Sighing, she went to meet him.

"You could have at least chose a table outdoors, Inumuta." She called out to him, putting down her bag and taking a seat. "It's not that chilly afterall and the sun is pretty nice."

Inumuta stopped typing away at his laptop. He was wearing a dark blue hoodie and a pair of jeans. He also had a grey scarf around his neck, covering his mouth a bit. His glasses were reflecting the light coming from the screen, tinting them with a cyan hue. Fixing them up on his nose with a hand, he moved the laptop sideways with the other.

"You know i easily suffer the cold." He said. "Moreover, it's hard to properly use a laptop outside during the day, the sunlight makes it hard to look at the screen." He paused, waiting for Ryuko to take out her books from the bag. "I have your last chemistry test here. I was checking it out and i'm surprised you got such a low score. Judging by your answers you do know the formulas and proceedings required to solve the questions. Can you tell me what happened?" He asked, pointing at the laptop and turning it a bit so Ryuko could see the screen.

"I don't know." Ryuko admitted meekly. "I probably lost focus and panicked when i couldn't answer one of the questions." There was no reason to lie. Or rather, she did try to lie her way out of an

afternoon with him in the past, when her pride still dictated most of her actions. But Inumuta had a small quirk:

Whenever knowledge and studying came in play, he became relentless.

He pressed her further and further, not letting her drop the topic until he was satisfied with her answers. Since then, she learned that it's better to just come out clean and tell him the truth.

"I thought that was the case." He said, agreeing with her assessment. "You did very good for the first dozen of questions. All answers are correct and you even applied the formula we studied together, a formula which your teacher has not explained in class yet." He praised her. That made her feel a bit better about it, since she really tried her best. "However..." He continued. "About halfway into the test you made some mistakes here and there, preventing you from answering a few questions. And the last portion of the test..." He paused for a second, scrolling the screen of his laptop downwards. The test sheet, which was elegantly written at the beginning, became a mess of arrows, words and formulas that was barely legible. "It's a mess. You literally self-destructed. From what I could gather, it seems your anxiety got the best of you when you failed to answer the questions in the middle."

"Right on point..." Ryuko thought. "So, what are we doing today?" She asked. "Please don't tell me we are starting back from scratch."

"That won't be necessary." He reassured her, fixing his glasses again. "You clearly know how to solve these questions after all. Today we are just going to try the test again. After that, I have a few more sheets we can work on to make sure something like this won't happen again."

"Lucky me..." Ryuko mumbled, dropping her head on the table. "Just go easy on me alright?" She said raising her gaze on him.

"What, you woke up on the wrong side of the bed?" He chuckled. Ryuko immediately reddened up, thinking back at what happened earlier that morning. Averting her gaze, she hummed a response, trying her best to hid her embarassment.

"..." Inumuta didn't answer. "Alright, let's just get started, shall we?" He sighed, earning a quick nod from the girl before they begun working on the test. Same as before, she easily answered the first dozen or so questions. She actually managed to deal with another batch of them without an issue. Since there was no grading nor time limit involved, she could focus her mind without feeling pressure. Eventually however, she made a mistake and things slowly spiraled down into a mess once again. Inumuta called out her mistakes multiple times. At the beginning Ryuko tried to calmly listen to him and fix her mistakes, but the more things she did wrong and the more annoyed she got, to the point where she started dropping her head on the table. And loudly at that.

"Alright Matoi. Let's try again." Inumuta sighed. "You already did this right here, what's the problem?"

"I don't knooooow..." Ryuko mumbled with her forehead pressed against the table. "How can this be the same as before! It's clearly different!" She complained. Once again, she hit the table with her head.

"Aaaand that's the twenty-third time..." Inumuta sighed again, mentally keeping count of then umber of headbutts the table endured so far. "Fine, let's try a different approach." He said then, leaning forward. "Read the question all over again. Out loud." Ryuko lifted her head a bit, sighed and did what she was told. "Now, tell me: What would your first step to answer this question be and why?" He asked, trying to reason with her. Ryuko thought about it for a moment, before giving her answer. "That's correct. Now, next step. We have this result, but that's not what the question is asking isn't it? We need to do something with this number here. What would you do?"

Slowly and steadily, Inumuta made her think about each single step needed to answer the question. Whenever she answered wrong he would tell her what her mistake would result in and why that was not the correct answer, leading her on the correct path. Sometimes she applied the wrong formula or choose the wrong values to input in an equation, but he corrected all her mistakes, making her realise that, indeed, that question was exactly the same as the previous ones.

Question after question, he kept doing that for a while. And, to his surprise, that was the correct method Ryuko needed for her to learn from her mistakes. He had to correct her often at the beginning, but towards the end of the test she was able to properly answer everything without his help. The same could be said of the extra sheets he brought. Ryuko managed to correctly answer everything he gave her.

"I'm beat!" She said, leaning against her chair after completing the last sheet. "I swear, i might actually dream about chemistry formulas tonight!" She sighed, earning a chuckle from Inumuta. He collected all the sheets of paper and begun reorganizing them. He was surprised that such a simple teaching method ended up being the most effective.

"Come on, Matoi..." He said pushing the stack of paper towards her. "It wasn't that bad. You saw it yourself. You know the answers, you just need to take the proper steps." Closing his laptop, he picked up his bag from the ground. "You just need to try and answer more questions. That way you can recognize the similarities between them."

"Practice more, uh?" She answered back, taking the tests and putting them in her bag. "I guess i can do that." She added. He was correct. The more questions she tried to answer and the easier it became for her to do so. "Think i'm ready for the next test?" She asked.

"Definitely." He responded. "And for that, i think you deserve a reward." He then proceeded to take two cans of beer from his bag.

Ryuko's eyes lit up when she saw them, immediately reaching out for one.

"What, so you do know how to have fun. I thought you were all books and smarts!" She chuckled, opening the can and downing half of it in one go. "That hit the spot! Nothing better than a cold one when you are tired!"

"Who did you take me for?" Inumuta asked back, taking a sip from his can. "Of course i drink alcohol. I just don't do it as often as most people. Too much of it hurts your body. Only a fool would underestimate the damages it can cause."

"Well then..." Ryuko grinned. "i'll toast to your wisdom, as the fool!" And proceeded to down the last of her can, laughing when Inumuta facepalmed at her statement.

Symphony

A.N: Sooo, this chapter took a bit more effort (and whiskey) than i originally planned. I would greatly appreciate if you could leave a review to let me know what you think about it. Feel free to also ask any question you might have, i'll do my best to answer them as soon as possible.

A sudden "A" reverberated in the air. The note was, however, imperfect.

Imperfect, just like the hands that pitched that note.

Imperfect, just like the girl who was holding the guitar.

Another "A" filled the air around her. This time, much closer to what it should have been.

A small, sad smile found its way on the girl's lips. A quick adjustment and, when the girl pulled the string again, the note came out crystal clear. Satisfied by her own little achievement, the girl proceeded to tune the next chord. Her mind was a turmoil of emotions, but the young girl didn't seem to be bothered in the slightest. She was so focused on her task that she didn't realise her thoughts were wandering back in time. With each tuned chord, her mind was pushed further and further into the past, reminiscing times she held dear. Times so close to her heart and yet so, so far out of reach.

Memories she treasured resurfaced in her mind. Memories about her father. About times long lost when she was but a small girl. She remembered when, so many years ago, she came back home after school. Music was permeating the hallways. It was a simple song, made up by simple notes. And yet, something about it resonated within her, pulling her into awe. She could feel emotions behind those notes. Frustration... Quickly replaced by... Satisfaction?

Happiness... With a hint of... Loneliness? A longing for something... Or someone...

Suddenly the music stopped and she realised she had silently made her way to the living room. Her father was looking at her, a smile on his face and a small tear in his eye. Ryuko released a breath she didn't know she was holding, surprised at that sight. He beckoned her close. Giving her a small hug, he sat her down next to him and proceeded to play that song once again, teaching the young girl about the music she has been charmed by.

Ryuko's hands stopped working on the guitar she was holding. A twinge of pain manifested in her heart and she could feel cold talons clawing at her chest. Her breath stiffened ever so slightly, a lump painfully forming in her throat. She was now aware of her emotions running rampant and gritted her teeth, trying to rein them back under control. Small cracks appeared all over her mental barrier as a surge of pain and sadness slammed against it, creaking due to the immense strain.

Ryuko suppressed a sob that almost escaped her lips, her shoulders shaking in the process. She couldn't allow herself to crumble right now. It wasn't the time. It wasn't the place.

But she knew it.

She felt her mental barrier almost break with that sob. Cracks spread out like a spider web, weakening it more and more. Tears formed at the corners of her eyes, lips smashed together in a thin line. Another sob was building up in her lungs and this time she knew she was going to fall apart.

Ryuko let her arms go limp along her sides. Tightening her fists, she braced for the outburst of emotions that was about to well up from within her.

"Who the hell is... Ryuko? What the fuck are you doing here?" A high pitched voice suddenly called out behind her, the young girl nearly

jumping out of her skin. The sudden scare, however, was welcomed, since it forced her mind in a state of cathartic reset. Pure white now filled her brain, and Ryuko took advantage of it to finally rein her emotions back under control.

"N-nothing!" She answered back, recognizing the owner of that voice as Nonon Jakuzure. "It's nothing! Really!" She repeated, not looking back to try and hide the broken mess of a state she was currently in.

"Nothing, uh?" Jakuzure parroted, obviously doubting the other girl's words. She was wearing casual clothes and a pair of boots, with pink being the dominant color in her attire. Her hair was hidden under a cap, except for two strands, one on each side of her face, reaching down to her shoulders. She was holding a case in her right hand, the instrument in it easily recognisable as a violin by anyone who laid their eyes upon it.

She was planning to practice alone that day, the music classroom providing that quiet and solitude she so desired during the long Sunday afternoons. Her plans were foiled, however, when she heard someone tuning a guitar in said room. Anger flaring up, she slammed the door open, ready to unleash all her fury against the poor soul that stole her favourite practice spot.

Immediately locking on her target, her wrath momentarily dispersed when she saw Ryuko standing in the middle of the room, her back facing the door Jakuzure just came through, scared out of her mind because of her so called greeting. It did reignite, however, when she saw an impressive amount of empty beer cans lying in a corner.

"Y-yes... N-nothing..." Was all Ryuko could answer. Jakuzure narrowed her eyes. She opened her mouth to retort with her usual sarcasm but her venomous remarks and nasty epithets suddenly died in her throat when she realised something. There was a quivering in Ryuko's voice. A silent tremble in her shoulders. A small shaking in her fists. To the untrained eye, those could have been impossible to perceive. But not Jakuzure. The frequency of vibrations was her forte, afterall.

Allowing herself to smile at her pun, she watched, as the telltale trembling racked the other girl's body. "That so..." She said, silently putting down her violin case on a desk nearby. She understood Ryuko was having a fit. She saw her in a similar state when she tried playing the guitar that time she lost a bet with Senketsu, who then proceeded to wrap his arms around the girl to calm her down. He was nowhere to be seen now, however, and it was crystal clear Ryuko desperately needed someone to comfort her. Jakuzure wasn't sure she could fit the bill, honestly, ignorant she was of what was plaguing the other girl. Something inside her, thought, was compelling her to be the one providing that warmth.

Silently, she picked up a chair and headed towards the other girl. Carefully placing it behind Ryuko, she then placed her hands on the girl shoulders, gently pulling her down. Ryuko, drained of all her strength, did not offer any resistance, letting the pink musician guide her movement. Jakuzure grimaced at how easily the girl surrendered to her touch.

"Satsuki... You asked us to keep an eye on her and help her out... But i wasn't expecting... Such a broken mess..." Jakuzure thought seeing the girl shiver in her hands. "Just what the hell happened... What the hell are you hiding from us..." Closing her eyes, Jakuzure sighed. Slowly, she wrapped her arms around the girl neck, resting her forearms on Ryuko's collarbones. She could feel a strong smell of alcohol coming from her, but she ignored it, focusing entirely on the girl in front of her.

Ryuko stiffened at the contact, not expecting the pink girl to act like that. "W-What the hell?" She asked weakly. "Y-You trying t-to choke me or s-something? L-let me go..." Ryuko tried to be tough and hide her turmoil, but her shaking was getting worse and she unconsciously put a hand on Jakuzure's arms in a silent request for comfort.

"No... That's not it..." Was jakuzure's answer, eyes still closed, a small smile on her lips. "I just thought you needed this..."

"W-what... No v-venomous remarks? No n-nasty c-comeback?" Ryuko laid her head back on Jakuzure's shoulder, closing her eyes to keep the tears from spilling out.

"How could i... When you are in such a deep pain..." She whispered back, tightening her embrace a little.

That was enough to push Ryuko over her limit. Tears streaked her cheeks as she broke down in the smaller girl's embrace.

Quite some time passed until Ryuko stopped crying. She was now lying down on two desks Jakuzure put together. Her head was resting in the smaller girl's lap, eyes closed. Jakuzure was gently caressing her, playing around with Ryuko's hair. She was humming a few songs, trying to soothe the poor girl of her pain.

Ryuko had something she wanted to say but she couldn't speak up. She was in a cathartic state of mind, dizziness and tiredness being the only feelings she had in her head. Jakuzure's gentle ministrations didn't help, slowly lulling her in a sense of security.

You are safe. It's ok. You can rest if you need to.

That was the silent message she was receiving from the small girl. And she would have gladly let herself fall asleep, embraced from that warmth. But she had to say something. Slowly opening her eyes, Ryuko sighed.

"I..." She started, her voice still hoarse. "I..." She tried again, this time much clearer than before.

"Ssh..." Jakuzure gently hushed her. "It's ok... You don't need to tell me anything... I know... This is going to be our little secret... I don't know what is the cause of your pain, but what i know is that you are not ready to talk about it just yet... So you don't have to..." With a smile, Jakuzure closed her eyes and resumed humming a song again.

Ryuko nodded slightly. All the strenght she gathered immediately left her again. "Thank you..." She whispered, closing her eyes. Her breathing and her hearth slowed down, as she finally let that sense of calmness sink into her body.

"For what?" Jakuzure asked calmly, her free hand intertwining with Ryuko's.

"For everything..." Was the answer. "I didn't know... You could be... So gentle..."

Jakuzure chuckled. "I think i just... Resonated with you."

"Resonated?"

Jakuzure paused for a moment to take a deep breath. "Music is a teacher, Ryuko. It teaches us empathy. It teaches us to pour our feelings into the world. It teaches us to understand our emotions, to understand what they can come from. It teaches us to recognize them, to share them with others, through the notes that make up the symphony of our being alive. Music is a teacher, yes, but it is also a mother, who envelops us in the warmth of her embrace. It's a friend who cheer us up in dark times. It's a companion who encourages us along our path. Music is life itself. Each of us is a sheet and our emotions are the notes that compose it. Suppressing them means leaving a void where there should have been a note, silence where there should have been music. Without music there is no life and without life there is no music. Maybe you think there is no music in your life right now, but it's there. You are alive, fighting tooth and nail against fate. And as long as you live, you will continue to fill the world with music. Your music."

Jakuzure couldn't fathom how powerful these words were for Ryuko. They stuck a nerve, leaving the girl breathless for a moment. "Thank you..." Was all Ryuko could whisper, closing her eyes and her mind finally at peace for the rest of the day.

"Again, for what?" Jakuzure asked with a smile. No answer was given however and the small girl lowered her gaze on Ryuko. She chuckled when she realised the girl fell asleep in her lap.

"I'll have to ask Satsuki a few things later..." She thought, humming a new song to the sleeping, hurt girl that lost her way.

"Thank you for what you did. Really, i mean it." Ryuko heard when she roused from her sleep a couple hours later. Her mind was still extremely foggy because of the alcohol and the sleepiness wasn't helping either, leaving her in a state of semi consciousness.

"It's fine, don't worry. I just felt i couldn't leave her like that." A second voice chimed in. The pitch was higher and Ryuko could recognize it as Jakuzure's voice. She felt a hand playing around with her hair. She purred, enjoying the feeling and the warmth she was receiving.

"Look at her..." The first voice said with a chuckle "Clinging at you like that. She looks like a small kitten. What kind of magic did you work on her, i wonder?"

"Who knows, Senketsu? Who knows..." Jakuzure gave a playful answer, smiling as well. "Still... It's hard to believe how much pain she bears..."

Silence.

"Did she tell you anything?" Senketsu asked, concern in his voice.

"I couldn't bring myself to ask... I thought she was suffering enough without me asking her to recall her wounds..."

"I see... Do you..."

"No... She will tell me when she's ready..."

"Alright... Thanks..." Senketsu sighed.

"On a different note... How can she handle all that alcohol? And where did she keep it?"

"She's always been good at handling her liquor..." He chuckled.
"And for the where, she has a stash hidden away in her room, where she stores the alcohol."

"How do you know?"

"Found it once, when i was taking care of her one night that she was wasted."

The duo chuckled.

"I think it's time i bring her back. Thanks Jakuzure. For everything." Senketsu said, slowly and carefully hosting Ryuko up in a princess carry. The girl groaned a bit when her head dangled backwards.
"Come on sleeping beauty. It's time to go home." He whispered gently.

"Shee' kets... I c'n wal' buh mys'lf" She tried to articulate unsuccessfully.

"Come on Ryuko. If you hold on to me i'll cook meat for you." He bargained, heading for his car with Jakuzure in tow, who decided to carry Ryuko's bag for her.

"Arright..." Ryuko smiled, weakly wrapping her arm around her friend neck lying her head on his shoulder. That earned another chuckle from Jakuzure and Senketsu, amused by her reaction to the promised meat.

Ryuko's world kept fading in and out of exsistance and she could barely understand what was going on. Senketsu lowering her into the passenger seat. The insides of his car, waiting for a traffic light to turn green. Before she could even realise, she already was in front of Senketsu's apartment entrance door.

"Come on, Ryuko. Think you can stand for just a moment?" He asked.

She nodded slightly. Senketsu slowly put her feet down, pulling back his hand to reach for the keys in his pockets. Ryuko was still wrapping her arms around his neck for support and that wasn't making things any easier.

Ryuko slightly opened her eyes for the first time since before Senketsu arrival in the music classroom. Light hurt her retinae but she could figure out Senketsu's face. Her gaze lingered upon his features for a brief moment, as if hypnotized by the sight.

The door opening brought her back to reality. Senketsu picked her up again and went inside, closing the door behind him with his leg. He headed to the bedroom, where he gently put Ryuko down.

"Ryuko, you need to let me go now, ok?" He whispered to the girl.
"How can i cook meat for you otherwise?" He chuckled.

The girl however didn't answer. She looked at him in the eyes, her mind somewhere so far away. Her breath was tickling his neck. A tinge of red was slowly spreading on her cheeks. her eyes flashed for a second as she slowly pulled in to lightly kiss Senketsu's neck.

"R-Ryuko?!" He asked surprised. He didn't know what to do and the girl's answer didn't help either. She whispered five words, softly, as if she didn't want to break a spell someone placed upon them. Just five words, before she pulled in for another kiss on his neck.

"Be part of my symphony."

Serenity

AN = Alright, just a couple of things before you can dive into the chapter. First off, i wasn't satisfied with the way i wrote the previous chapter so i tried to rewrite it a bit (but this time from Senketsu's perspective). Second, i'm experimenting a bit with my writing style, which is also the reason why it took me so long to finish this chapter (word count 4816, longest i ever wrote). Third, yes, those sentences in bold are a quote from another manga (i don't think i need to tell you which, but i will do in the next chapter if people request me to). And finally, didn't know that deleting my author's notes would be considered an update, sorry for the false alarm xD

"Thank you for what you did. Really, i mean it." Senketsu told Jakuzure.

About half an hour earlier she contacted him, with a short message. She told him to join her in the music classroom, summing up the events that took place in there. He quickly called his workplace, warning them he wouldn't be able to go that day, blaming sickness for his unavailability. His manager pondered for a moment, thinking who she could call in to cover for him. Senketsu held his breath. She wasn't very keen on the idea of people calling sick a couple of hours before their shift. He, however, was very dependable, always striving to improve himself. He never called in sick and always clocked in on time, even that one time a fever was plaguing his body. If he was saying he couldn't come to work, then something was going on but she didn't pressure him for an explanation. He could be given some leeway, considering all the effort he put in his job.

"Sure. I'll call someone else to cover you up." She answered. "I'll give you a two-days leave. Get some rest and get well soon, pal."

Senketsu sighed with a smile at his luck. "Thanks, i own you one." He said, hanging up the call.

Phone back in his pocket, he then reached for his car keys and left his apartment, locking the door in the process. Rushing down the stairs, he quickly made his way to the parking lot and got in his car.

Should have checked her stash... He thought, another sigh escaping his lips. Revving up the engine, he shook his head. Too late to worry about that anyway. Ryuko was safe and most likely made sure nothing could happen even if she got wasted. Jakuzure going to practice in that room was probably something she couldn't predict. Which could be considered a blessing in disguise, since now she had someone to take care of her in her current drunken state. Drinking always made her feel overwhelmed by her hidden demons. Sadness, melancholy, guilt, anger. A massive wave of emotions - negative emotions - would crash upon her, drowning her in despair. She would then drink even more, trying to escape this feeling of helplessness that would bubble up in her heart. However, with every drink a new wave would surge forth and the vicious cycle would repeat itself until she either passed out or she was stopped and comforted by someone else. Was she planning to stop drinking before that scenario would come to pass? If that was the case, what pushed her over her limits? What was the trigger that broke her down? Ryuko was hiding something from him. Something important, something that made her long for a way out - a way to escape reality - so that she could find stillness in that maelstrom that was threatening to steal her breath away. Something he needed to - something he had to - confront her about. But it was not the time for that yet. If she got wasted to the point where she was having a fit, she probably wouldn't be able to figure out not even half of the things Senketsu wanted to scold her about. Which means that he had to wait for her to recover from the massive hangover she was going to have in the following morning. And even though he considered that enough of a punishment already, he had to know - to talk with her - and tell her off for what she did. He would touch on those thoughts later, however, because before he knew it, he was already parking in front of the college.

Getting out of the car, he walked towards the classroom in which the girls were with quick steps. He traversed the entrance, spotting only a couple of other students, still loitering around with their friends before heading to their rooms. Some for rest, others for homeworks. Regardless of the reason, ten more minutes and nobody would be there anymore. Senketsu hurried along a few hallways and he finally reached the designated room. He was expecting to find Jakuzure outside, pouting about her foiled plans for violin practice and how her free time just went down the drain. Instead, he could hear the faint humming of a calm tune coming from behind the door. He stopped in his track for a moment, hand hovering above the door knob, listening to the song. He recalled hearing it somewhere before but he couldn't quite put his finger on it. Slowly, he then opened the door and silently slipped inside. He saw Jakuzure, her back turned towards him, sitting on a pair of desks put together, Ryuko lying down on them with her head in the smaller girl's lap. One of her hand was intertwining with Jakuzure's right one, the other was resting near her own chest. He stood there, puzzled by the sight of that Jakuzure, who was known for her fairly venomous remarks and sharp tongue, now gently soothing Ryuko. Taking a few careful steps, he tried to circle around the pair without making a sound, lest he would ruin the mood of that unexpected scene playing out in front of him. When he got in front of the small pink haired girl, he noticed she was humming her song with her eyes closed. Senketsu just stood there, listening carefully at the notes Jakuzure was so skillfully singing. It was a simple song, really, however her voice managed to reproduce each sound so perfectly that he couldn't help it but be charmed by that lullaby. A feeling of calmness - of serenity - enveloped the girl. A sense of reassurance and security bubbled up into Senketsu's heart, putting a smile on his lips.

Eventually, Jakuzure hummed the last note and the song came to an end. The feelings she aroused with her voice, however, lingered in the room for a few more minutes, leaving Senketsu to bask in the tranquility that permeated the air. She slightly opened her eyes and, with a nod, acknowledged the young man presence. Stifling a chuckle, she lightly tilted her head towards the girl in her lap. *She's*

fine. She's just sleeping, don't worry. She seemed to say with her eyes while, with her free hand, she gently caressed Ryuko's head, playing around with her hair a little. Senketsu nodded back to her. Credit where credit is due, the musician was able to handle Ryuko just fine and he couldn't be more grateful for that.

"Thank you for what you did. Really, i mean it." Senketsu told her, his smile never disappearing from his lips. He saw Ryuko stirred a little, but she still seemed to be asleep. He felt a bit guilty, knowing that soon he would have to wake her up from such a peaceful slumber, but he also knew he had to bring her back so she could rest properly.

"It's fine, don't worry. I just felt like i couldn't leave her like that." Jakuzure answered him, letting go of Ryuko's hand to wave her dismissal to Senketsu. She was about to open her mouth to add something when a sudden purr coming from the girl in her lap caught both students attention. Ryuko was enjoying the feeling of Jakuzure's hand carefully combing her hair and she tried to snuggle a bit closer to the musician, going as far as looping an arm around the smaller girl waist.

Senketsu blinked a couple times, before his eyes softened. "Look at her..." He started, chuckling at Ryuko's behaviour. "Clinging at you like that. She looks like a small kitten. What kind of magic did you work on her i wonder?" He felt a hint of jealousy seeing his friend seeking someone else's warmth, but he brushed that feeling away. He had no reason to feel like that afterall.

"Who knows, Senketsu? Who knows..." Jakuzure answered playfully, a smirk making its way on her lips. It didn't last long, however. Casting her gaze on the girl in her lap, she closed her eyes for a brief moment. She took a deep breath to calm herself, but her voice betrayed a hint of sadness nonetheless. "Still... It's hard to believe how much pain she bears..."

Silence dropped between the two. Senketsu felt his smile disappear. His concern for Ryuko went full throttle once again, as he remembered how hurtful she looked whenever she got drunk. He

swallowed, trying to deal with the lump that was forming in his throat. He suddenly noticed his fists were clenched - shaking, even - and his nails were digging into his palms. Taking a deep breath, he tried to relax for a moment. Was he... Angry? With whom? Himself, maybe? A few more seconds passed and he realised Jakuzure was looking at him. Her worried eyes snapped him back to reality, causing him to sigh.

"Did she tell you anything?" He asked, concern in his voice. Now was not the time for him to lose himself in thoughts. First, he had to find out what she knew about Ryuko. Then, he had to take care of his friend. Guilt and self-pity could wait until then. *Set your priorities straight.* He thought, clearing his mind of any possible distraction.

"I couldn't bring myself to ask..." Jakuzure answered shaking her head, her two strands of pink hair dancing around as she did so. "I thought she was suffering enough without me asking her to reopen her wounds..." Once again, she lowered her gaze on the girl in question. Even though her eyes were a bit puffed and her cheeks sported trails due to her tears, she was still smiling in her sleep. Still clinging at her, seeking her warmth. She was at peace. She was so different from the girl Jakuzure saw a few hours before, when she got into the room. Lonely. Vulnerable. Broken.

Broken. That last word stuck around in Jakuzure's mind. Barely registering Senketsu asking her if she wished to know more and her refusal, she recalled Ryuko's tears. Her heartrending cries so vivid in her memories that she could almost hear them again. *Broken.* She repeated, fully realising that it was such a fitting description - horrifyingly so - for the sleeping girl. What the hell just happened to her? She didn't know. Of course, she would be lying if she said she didn't want to know. But her curiosity could wait until Ryuko was ready to talk about it.

"On a different note..." Jakuzure cleared her throat, feeling the need to change topic. Her eyes darted around, trying to find something to talk about, when her gaze rested on the pile of empty cans nearby. "How can she handle all that alcohol? And where did

she keep it?" She asked Senketsu, pointing at an impressive stack of cans of beer, each one with a 0.5L mark on their label. Jakuzure just couldn't understand how Ryuko could just chug so much alcohol without passing out, nor how could she do that without a bathroom break.

Senketsu chuckled, smiling once again. Shaking his head, he crossed his arms, amused by Jakuzure's reaction. "She always could handle her liquor really well..." He said, suddenly realising that, regardless of that small quirk, Ryuko was sleeping soundly, as if she did, indeed, pass out. "And for your second question, she has a stash hidden in her room where she hides her stuff."

"How did you find out?" Jakuzure asked tilting her head a little. She tried her best to withhold a chuckle, as if anticipating his answer. Her efforts, however, proved futile.

"She got wasted." Senketsu plainly summarised. That was enough to make the duo chuckle again, both trying their best to suppress their laughs as much as possible, lest they would wake Ryuko up. The two slipped into a comfortable silence. They were content with just watching over the sleeping girl. Especially Senketsu. He savored that moment as much as possible, for he knew it was the so called calm before the storm. Him scolding Ryuko being the storm, that is. While he didn't mind the girl drinking so much, he wanted to be there when that happened, so he could take care of her. He would be lying if he said he didn't feel hurt - betrayed, maybe? - when he read Jakuzure's message. His gaze wandered outside the window. The sun was setting below the horizon, painting the sky with different shades of red. The mesmerising sight put his mind at ease once more. Maybe he could cut Ryuko some slack? A quick word of caution and just let her unwind? She was dealing with some serious stuff afterall. He entertained the thought for a bit, considering both merits and downfalls. His train of thoughts was interrupted, however, when a small groan from Ryuko brought back his attention.

"I think it's time I bring her back." With a smile on his lips, he got closer to the pair of girls. With a hand behind her kneecaps and one

behind her back, he carefully hoisted Ryuko up, bridal style. "Thanks Jakuzure. For everything." The pink haired musician returned his smile, waving him off with a hand. She was about to speak up when Ryuko groaned again, clearly uncomfortable with her head dangling backwards. "Come on, sleeping beauty. Time to go home." He whispered gently, a small chuckle threatening to escape his lips once again. Ryuko tried to voice her complains but she wasn't able to successfully articulate her sentence.

"Let's make a deal Ryuko. You hold on to me and I'll cook up some meat for you." He bargained with her. Tilting his head a bit, he sent a silent request to Jakuzure, asking her if she could pick up Ryuko's stuff for him. She nodded back, clearly understanding what he meant, and quickly got to work. Luckily, Ryuko brought with her very little that day, just her school bag and a plastic bag to carry her beers with her. Jakuzure was kind enough to also clean up after her mess, collecting all the empty cans into said plastic bag.

"Meeeat..." Ryuko failed, once again, to voice her agreement. After weakly looping her arm around his neck, her head rested against his chest. A sigh escaped her lips as she relaxed in his arms, his heartbeat beneath her ear slowly lulling her into sleep again. Both Senketsu and Jakuzure chuckled once again at her reaction. He was, however, blushing slightly. Oddly enough, he felt comfortable holding Ryuko like that and a feeling of satisfaction bubbled up inside him when he thought she was nodding off to the beat of his heart. It felt... Intimate...

When Jakuzure opened the classroom door for him, he quickly stepped out, heading to his car. The smaller girl caught up to him in no time after she locked the door and followed him into the parking lot. None of them spoke up the whole time and Senketsu was thankful for that. He was trying his hardest to clear his head about that sudden thought, but he just couldn't manage to. Why did he blush? Was it because he carried her in his arms bridal style? No, it couldn't be. He did that already a few days prior and he didn't react like that. What was the difference then? It couldn't be the

circumstance either. He was taking care of her just like he always did when alcohol was added to the equation. Then what was the trigger? What changed between them that caused his feelings to... Feelings. He confessed his platonic love to her. That he considered himself a fatherly figure for her. That was what changed. But it wouldn't make any sense, would it? Unless... Did he mistake his own feelings? Did he misunderstood his love for protectiveness? Senketsu shook his head, earning a confused look from Jakuzure, to which he just smiled back. He couldn't be mistaken. He knew he had a crush on another girl already, so how could he? But maybe... No, clearly not... However... Nope, not a chance... Although... Doubts kept surging in his mind and he kept debunking them. That back and forth repeated itself over and over and over again. Senketsu was overthinking his reaction so much that if he was an anime character, which he clearly wasn't, he would have smoke coming out from his ears by now.

At least she's a bit more responsive... Senketsu thought, fumbling around in his pocket in search of his apartment keys. He had to ask Ryuko to stand on her feet for a moment and, surprisingly, she was managing pretty well. Her arm was still around his neck, however, causing him to blush all over again. Since they left the classroom, Senketsu has been thinking about it. A lot. He couldn't figure out why such a simple gesture made his blood rush to his face. Especially considering it wasn't the first time she held on to him like that. But he had to focus on the task at hand, so he steeled his mind and proceeded to open the door. He then hoisted the girl up again. For a brief moment he thought Ryuko was looking at him with glazed eyes, but when he double checked he saw they were still closed. Was his mind pulling tricks on him? He certainly was tired but not to the point of imagining things. Shaking his head, he snapped back to reality, stopping his train of thought before it could even leave the station. Adjusting his grip on Ryuko's body, he traversed the door, closing it with his leg, and headed towards the bedroom. He didn't even bother turning on the light and, for a brief moment, he regretted his decision. His steps were a little uncertain, the darkness preventing

him to clearly see if any obstacle was in the way, but eventually he managed to reach the bed. His room was a bit messy, but a faint light coming from outside the window provided just enough illumination to navigate around the stuff on the floor. Carefully laying Ryuko down on the mattress, he took a deep breath to relax his body. A feeling of satisfaction sparked in his chest. With Ryuko taken care of, he only had to grab something to eat and he could rest.

"Ryuko, you need to let me go now, ok?" He whispered the question, hoping that the girl would unwrap her arm from around his neck. It was getting a bit uncomfortable after all, since he was slouched over to let her head rest on the pillow. "How can I cook up some meat for you otherwise?" He chuckled, remembering how that the girl was so eager to do as she was told when he tried to bargain with her previously. Oddly enough, the girl didn't react to that.

Did she feel asleep? Senketsu turned his head to check on the girl and immediately froze on the spot. Ryuko was staring at him, glazed eyes and deep in thought. And they were close. Very close. Senketsu's blush went up a notch, coloring his cheeks with an even deeper shade of red. His eyes were drawn into the girl's deep blue ones and he couldn't look away, as if a powerful magnet was pulling him in. Her lips were lightly parted away, allowing her breath through. Each time she exhaled, Senketsu felt a bit ticklish on his skin, sending small shivers along his neck. Her black hair were sprawled around on the pillow, framing her face as if it was a painting. Seconds turned to minutes and minutes turned to hours. For what felt like an eternity, Senketsu's only thought was the girl in front of him and how her beauty was unparalleled. The noises coming from outside faded out in the background and all he could hear was his accelerated heartbeat and their breaths, which, oddly enough, were slowly synching up. All of his worries, all of his concerns, all of his doubts about his feelings vanished in thin air, washed away as if they were never there in the first place. Something clicked inside him. Holding Ryuko in his arms and being in hers. It just felt... Right... He felt as if there was no other place he would rather be. As if they were covering for each other's weaknesses. As if they were supporting

each other strenghts. Why was he so troubled by his thoughts when there was nothing to think about? Why was he so confused about his feelings when they were so clear? Why was he beating himself up so hard about his questions when the answer was right in front of him all along? A slight tinge of red spread on Ryuko's cheeks. Senketsu noticed that, for the briefest of moments, her eyes flashed with something uncertain. A feeling of vulnerability. Of longing. Of desire. Ryuko, suddenly, gently pulled him with her arm, trying to get even closer than what they already were. Slowly, she kissed his neck, waking him up from his daze.

"R-Ryuko?!" He asked, suprised by the young girl's action. His brain short-circuited at her bold behaviour but her next few words were the straw that broke the camel's back and, with a warm smile, he just let go and decided to indulge in Ryuko's silent request.

"Be part of my symphony."

Morning came way too fast for Ryuko. As soon as she woke up, a massive headache assaulted her, a groan escaping her lips. However, despite that, she felt comfortable. She smiled, snuggling a bit more to her body pillow and wrapping her arm around it. It was giving off a pleasant warmth that she didn't want to part with. The blankets barely covered her chest, leaving her arm, shoulder and collarbones exposed. She felt something wrap around her waist, pulling her closer to the body pillow. Then, a gentle kiss was placed on top of her head. A wave of happiness and serenity washed over her, numbing her headache a little bit. Basking in those feelings, she took a deep breath and relaxed her body. Something begun to gently scratch her back, sending a few, pleasurable shivers up her spine. She purred, enjoying the skinship she longed for so badly. Her body pillow was slowly expanding and contracting rythmically and she synced up her breathing with it. Its calm heartbeat was lulling her back to sleep and-

Wait... What? The sudden realization hit her hard, snapping her back from her daze. She opened her eyes, but her sight was still

blurry from her slumber. Her mind felt fuzzy due to the last remnants of alcohol in her bloodstream. She could somehow make out the outline of a male body lying close to her. Very close. Casting her gaze upwards, she tried to identify the person with her but she was unable to do so. Fear built up inside her and blood drained from her face. Eyes darting everywhere, she couldn't recognize the room she was in. The lack of proper lighting also had a part in that. Her breath became ragged as her mind tried its hardest to process what the hell was going on. Her eyes began to tear up from the anxiety. She started hyperventilating. Her body was shaking badly and she was incapable to keep herself under control. Her voice died in her throat. Her mind blanked out. She felt vulnerable and powerless. Her fight or flight instinct kicked in, screaming at her to get the hell out of there but her legs refused to act. The person near her was saying something, but she couldn't hear him properly. Weakly flailing around with her arms, she tried to free herself from the bedsheets. Hyperventilation caused a lack of oxygen in her body and her head started spinning around, small dots appearing in her field of view. The other person raised his hands defensively, but Ryuko, in her state of confusion, perceived that as an attack and panicked, trying to push the danger away from her. She couldn't put up much of a fight, as her body clearly lacked strength, but she did, however, manage to smack the figure in the face.

"OW!" A voice screamed out. Ryuko froze, realising who that voice belonged to. Her breathing stopped for a brief moment and, when she managed to force her lungs to work again, that helped her breath much more regularly than before. Her eyesight returned to normal and, when she could finally see, she recognised the person next to her as Senketsu, one hand holding his face where Ryuko hit him. His eyes were closed and a painful look was all over his face. Trembling, she cupped his cheeks with her hands, as if she was trying to prove he was indeed her friend and not another entity that was there to hurt her. She wanted to apologise but her voice still refused to work properly. Her breath was still slightly ragged, but it was enough to alleviate her state of mind, at least partially.

Senketsu moved his hand away when he felt Ryuko's gently caressing his cheeks. Opening his eyes, he gazed at the girl in front of him for a moment. "Talk about a wake up call..." He joked, a warm smile spreading on his lips. That odd sentence was enough to help the girl relax a bit more. Her body stopped shaking and her mind woke up its slumber. Her emotions calmed down as well, though one of them was still rampaging around inside of her: Embarrassment. With self-control came awareness. And with that came the realisation she was in his apartment. In his bed. Naked.

Her cheeks flared up immediately. During her struggle to get free, the bedsheets were thrown around a bit and were now barely covering her up to her navel. She quickly reached out for them to hide her body. Multiple thoughts crossed her mind but where all overshadowed by the awkwardness of that situation. Her gaze returned to Senketsu, who was stifling a chuckle at her reaction. Pouting, she playfully hit him again and buried her head in his chest, unable to maintain eye contact with him any longer. Ryuko wasn't stupid. She knew what happened last night even without him spelling it out for her. And while she was still trying to understand her feelings, she knew, deep down, she was happy. When Senketsu revealed his fatherly feelings for her, she realised that wasn't enough for her. She wanted more. She wanted to be part of his life. She wanted to walk alongside him towards whatever the future held in store for them. As long as he was by her side, she was confident she could handle anything. And maybe - just maybe - heal from the scars of her past.

Thus, he let him embrace her once again. His arms pulled her closer, skin on skin, and she basked in his warmth. There was no need for words. No need for lengthy explanations, heart-to-heart talks or whatnot. Their feelings were made clear to each other through their actions. And that was more than enough for the couple. Ryuko smiled. A true, heartfelt smile, different from her usual grin. She finally found her safe place. In the arms of the man she loved.

Little did she know, however...

Fate is always playing games with the lives of many

That everything was bound to fall apart...

Your downfall, your despair, even your demise

For in a few weeks her past would come back to haunt her.

Are always just a roll of the dice away.